

Community-engaged Maritime Security: Beyond ‘Eyes and Ears’

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In March 2018, as per media reports, Neil Basu, the Scotland Yard’s newly appointed Indian-origin Assistant Commissioner of Police responsible for counter-terrorism, launched a new campaign to urge the public to fight terrorism. According to the report, of the nearly 31,000 reports made by the public in 2017, more than 6,600 (21.3 percent) resulted in ‘useful’ intelligence. Basu also highlighted that the statistics substantiated the assertion that ‘communities defeat terrorism’, and that the Yard’s success in foiling 14 terror plots would not have been possible without community-support. The media report also brought out that research indicated that 80 per cent of people are motivated to report suspicious activity, but they were unclear what exactly they should be looking for.

The concept of community-policing, or its variants— community-based policing or community-oriented policing —have several definitions. India’s Bureau of Police Research and Design (BPR&D), Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), has defined community-policing as the *“forging of a cost-effective problem-solving partnership between the police and the community.”* In ancient India, policing had a community orientation, with the village chief doubling as the police officer. However, the need to enforce colonial rule by a formally constituted police force, led to the abandonment of this age-old practice. Following Independence, and with ‘law and order’ being listed as a state subject, several state-level initiatives were launched to once again create and leverage the concept of community policing.

Subsequent to the Mumbai blasts in March 1993, a joint coastal surveillance operation, Operation SWAN, was launched in April 1993. In July 1999, the

Maharashtra police, with the support of the Indian Navy, implemented a coastal-community (policing) initiative—the *Sagar Rakshak Dal* (Sea Protection Group)—in 263 villages, with the aim of enhancing coastal security surveillance along the Maharashtra coast.

Subsequently, after ‘26/11’, similar community groups, involving fishing- and coastal communities, have been established in India’s coastal states and Union Territories (UTs), and integrated into the national coastal security construct. These groups include the *Sagar Suraksha Dal / Gram Rakshak Dal* (Village Protection Group) in Gujarat and Karnataka; *Kadalora Jagratha Samithi* (Coastal Awareness Committee) in Kerala; Village Vigilance Committees (VVC) in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh; and, the Fishermen Watch Group in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. These groups facilitate institutionalised mechanisms for periodic community interaction with the coastal police.

In addition to establishment of community groups, other initiatives to engage the coastal communities for strengthening coastal security include:

- The conduct of Community Interaction Programmes (CIP) by the Indian Coast Guard to promote participation of fishers/ coastal community in policing, by functioning as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the concerned security agencies. The CIPs also contribute towards improving maritime safety-awareness amongst fishers. Likewise, the Indian Navy, too, conducts Coastal Security Awareness Programmes (CSAP).
- The setting-up of a Toll-Free Number (1093), which facilitates 24x7 free telephone access to the concerned State Marine Police. The Indian Coast Guard’s Search-and-Rescue (SAR) Assistance Toll-Free Number (1554) is also available as an alternative number.
- Inducting fishers and coastal citizens as Special Police Officers (SPOs) and as members of the Marine Home Guard (MHG).

The Police-Community Partnership (PCP), a pan-India ‘overarching community-policing model’, has been envisaged under the ‘community-policing’

micro-mission of the National Police Mission (NPM). The model, with ‘beat policing’ at its foundation level, encompasses an interface at the beat-level and police station-level with citizens; the enrolment of citizen volunteers as *Police Mitra-s* (Friends of the Police); the establishment of Community Liaison Groups (CLGs); and, the setting-up of a ‘Community-Policing Training and Documentation Centre’ in each state.

Consequent upon the report of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on Reforming National Security (2001), a State Marine Police has been established in all coastal States/ UTs, and, dedicated Coastal Police Stations (CPS) have been set-up by coastal states and UTs, with financial assistance from the Centre, under the MHA’s Coastal Security Scheme (CSS). Further, State Marine Police Training Centres (SMPTCs) are also envisaged in coastal states for coastal security. Extrapolating the land-based PCP model for coastal security will entail an interface between coastal/ fishing communities and the respective CPS.

The Indian Navy’s Strategy Document, *Ensuring Secure Sea: Indian Maritime Security Strategy (2015)*, underscored the potential of the fishing and coastal communities to complement the efforts of security agencies, as also their significant contribution towards enhancing security. It further emphasised, as a focus area, the need to ‘involve, sensitise and incentivise’ the contribution of the coastal-community to coastal security.

While efforts at engaging the coastal community in coastal security are being pursued with increased vigour and scope, a few issues that merit attention, include the following:

- Community-policing, driven by the state, often has a state-centric security predisposition (national/maritime/coastal security), rather than a citizen-centric safety focus (human security). Although the process of engagement between the community and security personnel does facilitate better mutual understanding, such engagement, to be effective, must also place equally focus upon issues related to human security, such as safety, and, a rapid, comprehensive, and humane response to accidents, disasters and coastal erosion.

- According to some estimates, CIPs have been able to reach out to only a small fraction of the community, and are unevenly distributed across coastal villages, in terms of both time and space. A more formalised mechanism has, therefore, been recommended, and in the form of a central scheme supported by appropriate budgetary allocations.
- Coastal communities themselves have suggested the need for better training. It is noteworthy that the *Apada Mitra* (Friends in Disaster) scheme for disaster management has been institutionalized with an earmarked financial allocation. This scheme entails the training of over 6,000 volunteers across disaster-prone districts as first responders in the case of a disaster. Establishment of SMPTCs and Community Policing Training Centres will also facilitate training.
- Language is a barrier in communication. The vernacular is a prerequisite for effective communication, and therefore, rather than central agencies, it is the State Marine Police, in accordance with the overarching model of PCP, which is best-positioned to steer such engagements.
- The present communication through toll-free numbers has, of course, been very useful. However, considering the penetration of mobile telephony (including data), the user-friendliness of mobile applications (apps), and the power of social media, the development of suitable 'app-based' services for security (and policing) could facilitate even greater community engagement, albeit within limited ranges. , The Royal Malaysian Navy (RMN), for example, has launched a mobile app 'K3M' to engage with the maritime community. Likewise, Scotland Yard encourages online communication (in addition to telephonic reporting). Encouragingly, the Government of India, too, has a tie-up with Facebook for disaster-response (this, of course, might well end-up being one of the inadvertent victims of the data-scandal involving Facebook and Cambridge Analytica).
- Many women in coastal areas/ fishing hamlets are reportedly not aware of issues related to security (and do not know about the toll-free numbers that they can use to establish contact with the concerned agencies in case of an emergency).

Consequently, as in other social-welfare projects, women-focussed engagement, could generate greater community-support in cases involving safety and security.

In sum, the Scotland Yard statistics have not only validated their own case, but have also substantially proved a concept. This strengthens the case for community policing elsewhere, including for coastal policing and maritime security. The community-engagement initiatives launched by the Indian Navy, the Indian Coast Guard, and the Maharashtra Police have, over the past two decades, been expanded to cover all coastal states and UTs and become far more institutionalised. Meanwhile, community policing, as a policing-concept, has also gained traction in India. As Scotland Yard contends, inputs from the community can provide ‘useful’ information – if not ‘actionable intelligence. While hard intelligence and niche technologies – such as space-based surveillance, cyber surveillance, technical and electronic surveillance – can and do fail, human beings (and communities) remain a reliable source of information. With increasing low-cost sensors and technologies available to the communities themselves, the ‘eyes and ears’ concept perhaps goes beyond literally just ‘eyes and ears’. Continued community-engagement for maritime security, therefore, remains imperative.

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